

SERIAL STORY

THE VANISHING FLEETS

By
ROY NORTON

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WEIL

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SYNOPSIS.

"Vanishing Fleets," a story of "what might have happened," opens in Washington with the United States and Japan on the verge of war. Guy Hillier, secretary of the British embassy, and Miss Norma Roberts, chief aide of inventor Roberts, are introduced as lovers. The government is much criticized because of its lack of preparation for strife. At the most inopportune moment Japan declares war. Japan takes the Philippines without loss of a man. The entire country is in a state of turmoil because of the government's indifference. Guy Hillier starts for England with secret message and is compelled to leave Norma Roberts, who with military officers, also leaves Washington on mysterious expedition for an isolated point on the Florida coast.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

"I don't know what it's all about, boys," he said, relenting. "I wish I did; but I have no more knowledge of it than you have. I don't even know why Miss Roberts is aboard; but this much I am certain of: That the men in Washington know what they are doing, and all the rest of the world can just keep on criticizing and guessing. As far as we are concerned, we are officers who have sworn to and will obey orders, even if they tell us to go to the outer edge of the flat earth."

Darkness came on them before their next stop was made, and they slowed down as they passed through the yards of a large city, felt their puffing locomotive being uncoupled, and heard the slow resonant snorts of a fresh one being driven into place. They were tired of the day's traveling, and sat in listless silence, looking through the open windows at the half deserted platforms. Newsboys were running here and there offering the latest editions, and they called them to the side of the coach and bought newspapers from them. The silence in the car was broken by the admiral, who had been the first purchaser.

"Well, I'll be blanked!" he said, angrily crumpling his paper into a ball which he threw on the floor at his feet, before he began striding up and down the aisle. What he had read beneath glaring headlines was this:

"Washington, May 28.—The Japanese have taken the Hawaiian islands, together with the gunboats Marietta and Corbett, and are now landing troops from a large transport. The incredible and disgraceful feature of the affair is that not a gun was fired by either side, our officers contenting themselves by running up the white flag when the enemy approached. The cable operator sending the message said that he did so under the surveillance of two Japanese officers, who at the conclusion of the message would disconnect the cable, thus putting the islands out of communication."

CHAPTER III.

When the Flag Came Down.

The government was compelled to take action toward pacifying its own subjects immediately after the news of the Hawaiian surrender, public indignation having risen to the point where the people threatened to take matters into their own hands. Without a dissenting voice the journals of the country came forth with scathing editorials, occasionally asking the president whether it was the intention of the administration to run up a white flag as soon as a fast approaching enemy neared the shores, and thus surrender the whole United States. Therefore an appeal for patience was issued in the following terms:

"The president and his cabinet, acting for and empowered by congress in special session, most urgently ask the people of the United States to withhold judgment on the conduct of the war for at least a week longer; when it will be fully demonstrated that the government is following a well-defined policy, which will not only avert bloodshed, but will impose no disgrace upon our country. The exigencies of the situation are such that to make public our plans would be to defeat our own ends. We therefore ask the earnest support and co-operation of the people of the United States by such means as lie within their power, which at this time can be

shown best by a cessation of meetings and criticisms tending only to embarrass the government in the discharge of its duty and the bringing to a successful termination the conflict which is now on."

Contrary to the usual form of proclamation, this one was signed not only by the president, but by all members of his cabinet, who, therefore, jointly assumed the responsibility. At first there was an inclination to deride the message, and then when more sober thought prevailed a spirit of fairness dictated that the administration should have its chance.

Foreign advices indicated that no attack might be expected against the shores of the United States proper for even a greater length of time than ten days; hence the respite of seven days seemed a reasonable limit within which the government might demonstrate its theories.

It was possible that the public temper would have remained passive for the full period, but for a somewhat unfortunate and graphic description of what had taken place in the Philippines, cabled by the correspondent of a London paper, who had been on the scene, and which read as follows:

"The surrender of the Philippine islands by the United States to Japan constitutes what is probably the most remarkable chapter in the history of wars. Not only was there no battle fought nor any attempt made at defense, but what is worse, or would seem so to any man with red blood in his veins, is the humiliation imposed upon the Americans by their

intimate friendship not only with the civil officials of the islands, but with the men of the army and navy as well, and is therefore in a position to give trustworthy and detailed information of what at this time seems little less than an infamy.

"It had been known for some days that orders of a most remarkable nature had been received by the governor of the islands and the commanding general. What these were, however, remained a secret until that memorable day of May.

"At ten o'clock on the morning of May 27 a cloud of smoke became visible on the horizon, and when within range of the glasses it was discovered that in the offing floated two cruisers of the first class and one battle ship, flying the Japanese flag and cleared for action. The officer in command of the fort at once communicated this fact to the governor, and a consultation was called, to which all officials of both branches of government were summoned. Inasmuch as the gravity of the situation required the absolute concurrence of all concerned, the consultation was not confined to men of high rank, but included every commissioned officer from the army and every official of standing in the civil government. The men, wondering at this strange call, and aware that something unexpected had happened, responded to the summons and repaired to the governor's office, where they seated themselves silently, and waited for that executive to address them. He, a man grown gray in the diplomatic service of his nation, paced

hearing, and then suddenly broke into angry exclamations of surprise and indignation. By a most remarkable display of authority they were brought into subjection again, the commanding general, a man at almost retiring age, rising before them and holding up a warning hand. 'Gentlemen,' he said quietly rebuking them, 'our first duty is that of obedience.'

"The officers, looking at one another, settled into their seats, and in a most instant the silence in the room had grown painful. The governor, still holding his papers before him, slowly continued:

"Fearing trickery on the part of a prospective enemy, I doubted the authenticity of my instructions. I used a secret code which has never gone beyond the hands of the most confidential men in my department, and to my surprise received absolute confirmation. To you of the army I will say that before this verification was received, your general, and here he turned to his white-haired confere, 'had been the recipient of a command from the secretary of war of the United States couched in almost the same terms.'

"At the conclusion of his speech this fine old man sank back into his chair with bowed head as if the disgrace of his country was his own. There was a more or less dignified discussion participated in by the older officers present; but interrupted now and then by some of the younger men, who favored totally ignoring the orders and defending the islands to the death. The cooler heads among them prevailed, and at last it was recognized that there was no alternative save absolute and unqualified surrender.

"Before the meeting could be officially dispersed the sullen boom of a gun came heavily from the sea, reverberating through the room. The men sprang to their feet and rushed toward the exit, knowing that war was upon them, but that their hands were tied as hopelessly as though bound with manacles of steel.

"There, within range of their own heavier guns, floated a formidable fleet from Japan. Even while their conference was in progress, cruiser after cruiser and floating forts of steel had crept up over the horizon. The Japanese gunners were testing their range; but no damage had been done. I saw a procession of crestfallen men, going as if to a funeral, enter their fortress gates and silently gather round the great flagstaff, from which floated a hitherto unsullied banner. A grim old man grown gray in war and scarred with the marks of many battles, walked to the halyards, gave them a pull and brought fluttering to the ground the flag under which he had fought so valiantly. A colonel of his staff took from the hands of an orderly a cloth of white, the emblem of the world over of defeat with or without honor, fastened it into the idle loops and pulled it aloft.

"The general, a warrior no longer, but a heart-broken old man, turned away from his colleagues, walked across the parade, and the door of his quarters closed upon him. Several other members of his staff did likewise, and still others stood silent on the ramparts, watching the outcome of this event. The ships ceased firing, and, as if perplexed by this unwarranted outcome, seemed to be communicating with each other, dexterously wigwagging signal after signal. A torpedo boat destroyer slowly separated itself from the flotilla and came suspiciously nosing its way toward the land, winding in and out as if fearing floating mines or sunken engines of destruction.

"As it neared the shore, it was seen that on its black deck stood the admiral of the fleet, together with his staff. They were met at the landing by a deputation of officers, both civil and military, who escorted them to the fort. No one can depict the expressions, half surprise and half inquiry, which overspread the countenances of this insignificant invading force. A party of less than ten men without arms was actually accomplishing the most remarkable conquest in all history.

"At the entrance to this city of masonry and steel, equipped with silent monsters of warfare, embodying all the latest and most formidable instruments of offense and defense, built to withstand the onslaught of the combined navies and armies of the world, stood the sullen, shamefaced officers of the vanquished garrison, the gilt of their full dress uniforms untarnished by powder or smoke, and shining garishly in a midday sun. There, drawn up in line, were men who would have fought to death and gone exultantly into another world rather than face the disgrace which had been heaped upon them by an unworthy clique of superiors in office.

"The Japanese admiral advanced to the sacrificed but not defeated general and extended his hand, offering the commonplace courtesies of the lay. There was no need of an interpreter, the head of the victorious force speaking the English he had learned at the United States Naval academy, in which he had been educated.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



The Flag Under Which He Had Fought So Valiantly.

home government. To an impartial observer it would appear that nothing but madness could dictate such a policy. The facts of the case are as follows:

"Although trouble had been expected with Japan by every reasoning inhabitant of the islands for many months, the government at Washington apparently made no attempt whatever to strengthen its position, and, on the contrary, seemed rather endeavoring to weaken it. As the whole world knows, there have been immense and costly fortifications under progress of construction in the islands for the last ten years. More than 30 days ago, by official order, work on these defenses was summarily stopped, the workmen discharged and the engineers ordered home. This was the first act of treachery toward the Philippines.

"Immediately following this incomprehensible action all war vessels in waters surrounding the islands and on the Pacific station were ordered to ports in Europe, where they rendezvoused in what can never be anything but neutral territory. And there they are at this moment, thousands of miles from the scene of conflict, incapable of either offense or defense. Had the government deliberately chosen to put itself out of touch with the whole war, it could have selected no more effective method. Your correspondent has had the honor of an

up and down the room as if loath to speak.

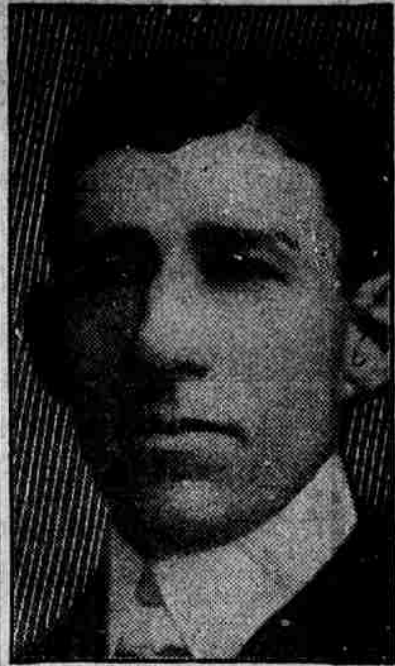
"Gentlemen," he began, "it is not within my province to criticize the acts of the department which I represent nor to find fault with its desires, and yet I have before me at this moment the most humiliating instructions which in more than forty years of life in a responsible capacity I have ever received."

"He stood for a few moments, as if dreading to tell his auditors of his country's shame, and then with trembling hand opened a drawer of his desk and took out a file of official documents, which he held before him as he continued:

"At the time when work was stopped on the fortifications of this harbor I received additional orders to the effect that in case of any overt act or warlike demonstration upon the part of Japan we were not to make any defense unless it involved the saving of our lives, and to surrender the islands in toto to our enemy."

"It has been your correspondent's privilege to witness many scenes where the tempers of men were tried as by fire; but never yet has he been compelled to view the deliberate mortification of at least two score of valiant men; in such a peremptory and unheard of manner. They sat as if stupefied by an overwhelming catastrophe, looking at one another as if incredulous and doubting their own

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